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PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 240439Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8568
INFO RUEHZM/GCC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0825
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 1768
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 1028
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1375
RHWSMRC/USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHKU/OMC-K KUWAIT KU

UNCLAS KUWAIT 000414

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE, SIPDIS

STATE FOR AIAG, NEA/ARP, NEA/RA; CAIRO FOR LINDA LOGAN
AMMAN FOR WHITTLESEY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AMED](#) [CASC](#) [KSCA](#) [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAIT AVIAN FLU UPDATE #5

Ref: Kuwait 332 and previous

1. (SBU) Summary: On March 20, Post convened a meeting of its Avian Influenza Working Group (AIWG), which includes U.S. military health officials from local bases, to discuss recent developments in the outbreak of avian influenza in Kuwait. The number of confirmed cases now stands at a total of 54, according to GOK health officials. GOK officials have refuted press reports of a suspected case of AI infection in a 15-year old boy, saying that the boy has bacterial pneumonia not AI and warning that inaccurate reporting endangers the country. ARCENT officials confirmed that Iraq has banned all poultry imports from Kuwait, and ARCENT's suspension of egg purchases from Kuwaiti producers remains. Public Authority for Agriculture and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) surveillance and culling continues. End summary.

2. (SBU) Post convened its Avian Influenza Working Group for the third time since the mid-February outbreak of the avian flu among poultry in Kuwait. Participants noted that the GOK has refuted press reports of a 15-year old with a suspected case of AI, stressing that the boy has bacterial pneumonia not AI. Ministry of Public Health Undersecretary Essa Al-Khalifa affirmed that there are "no suspicious human cases of bird flu in Kuwait." MOH spokesperson Ahmad Al-Shatti cautioned that "wrong statements endanger the whole country." Dr. Jamal Al-Duaj, Director of the Infectious Disease Hospital added that the "media should seek the truth and rumors have negative impact on our national security." Meanwhile, PAAAFAR continues its surveillance program. However, AIWG members noted that the black market trade of birds remains a concern because effective surveillance of this subset is virtually impossible.

3. (SBU) Joining Qatar and Oman, Iraq is now the latest country to ban the import of Kuwaiti poultry products. ARCENT's ban on Kuwaiti eggs also remains in place despite lobbying by Kuwaiti poultry producers who stressed that their birds are being monitored and are still safe. Before the ban, the U.S. military was the largest buyer of Kuwaiti poultry products, purchasing about 500,000 eggs a day. Kuwaiti poultry producers invested in a number of health upgrades in recent years to attract USG consumers, said one AIWG member, and will now be significantly affected by this ongoing ban.

4. (SBU) An AIWG member noted that a GOK investigation into an increase in dead pigeons at Ali Al-Saleem Air Force Base is ongoing. The deaths were initially believed to have been linked to a planned USG bird eradication program but it was later discovered that the program had not yet commenced.

5. (SBU) There continue to be few AI-related inquiries from American citizens since the initial press reports in late-February and the February 28 release of the mission's warden message.

Neither the British nor the Australian Embassies have released warden messages to date.

¶6. (SBU) AIWG discussion then turned to the issue of security in the event of a wider, although not currently indicated, outbreak. There are currently between 16-18,000 Americans living in Kuwait, an increase of 10% from last year and 20% from the year before, according to consular records. If there is a wider outbreak, will the GOK be able to maintain security and ensure the continuation of key services? In general, AIWG members believe the GOK is more prepared to handle a crisis than many developing countries, but only time will tell.

¶7. (SBU) If the frequency of new cases remains low, AIWG members will use future meetings to brief and solicit feedback on current contingency plans and to refine and document communication networks to ensure continued coordination. The AIWG agreed to reconvene in one month, unless events warrant an earlier meeting.

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